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Close-Up

Did CIA Misinterpret Joan Baez?

It looks like the CIA "scandal" is dying down, which is a shame because it was fun while it lasted. Looking back on the whole mess, it did have a kind of Keystone Kops flavor to it.

For instance, did you happen to notice that even the National Council of Churches got some of the swag? This development slipped by me until a council official, just back from New York, mentioned it in passing during a talk at our church Wednesday night.



He said his colleagues got very upset when they learned of the CIA grant. But after much hair-pulling, someone saw the bright side.

"Look," he said, "maybe this can get us off the 'commie' hook," the suggestion being that this might be used as a counter against some right wing kooks who are trying to paint the council red.

Then there was Norman Thomas, the grand old man of the Socialist Party in this country. He, too, was surprised to learn he had been beneficiary of a CIA grant. This had to do with a project he operated in Latin America from 1957 until last year.

Thomas couldn't find any bright side to it. He was mortified. "I am ashamed we swallowed this CIA business," he lamented. "If I had a choice I would never have accepted CIA support."

Even the Internal Revenue Service got embarrassed. Someone found out that the IRS is investigating the tax exempt status of the National Student Association. The NSA, remember, was original co-star in the "scandal."

Well, when some NSA members claimed that the IRS probe was instigated by CIA because a few NSA officers had squealed on the spy outfit, IRS categorically denied the charge, pointing out that the tax investigation had started over a year before anyone squealed.

Latest to climb onto the CIA's back is the Allgemeiner Studentenausschuss. (Note to Linotype operator: Please be careful with this one because I'll never be able to spell it for you again.) This outfit is something like a student council at West Berlin's Free University. The (see name above) is calling on West Berlin's mayor to make sure no CIA money is being spent in the school.

Also there was the Japanese interpreter who blew the lines of folksinger Joan Baez during a Tokyo TV appearance. When Miss Baez said on TV she had refused to pay all her U.S. taxes because she opposed the Vietnam war, it came out through the interpreter: "Taxes are high in the United States."

The story is going around that the CIA put the interpreter up to this—maybe even paid him to do it.

This may or may not be so. But while many people in the United States do not agree with what Miss Baez actually said, a heckuva lot more agree with what the interpreter said she said.—JIM RANKIN.